



Integrating Hazard Assessment into Comprehensive Planning *An Analysis of the Current State of Iowa Comprehensive Plans*

Introduction

The Iowa Smart Planning Legislation signed into law by Governor Culver on April 26, 2010 charges the Task Force with analyzing Iowa comprehensive plans to determine if hazards are considered. Specifically, the Task Force must:

Review municipal comprehensive plans to determine the number of such plans that address the hazards identified in section 18B.2 subsection 2, paragraph “k” (“Hazards Elements”, and the adequacy of such plans in addressing those hazards.

Hazards Elements

Objectives, policies, and programs that identify the natural and other hazards that have the greatest likelihood of impacting the municipality or that pose a risk of catastrophic damage as such hazards relate to land use and development decisions, as well as the steps necessary to mitigate risk after considering the local hazard mitigation plan approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

This report details the process and results of the evaluation of a sample of municipal plans across the State of Iowa. These results will be used to recommend further action with regard to hazard assessment elements in comprehensive plans.

Process

To conduct an evaluation of the adequacy of plans to address the “Hazards Elements” section of the legislative guide, a sampling of nine cities and 3 counties was taken. The cities and counties fit into the categories described below and were randomly sampled based on the availability of the entity’s comprehensive plan.

Table 1. City sampling by population tier.

Population Tier	City 1	City 2	City 3
Less than 5000	Adel	Hudson	Lamoni
5000 to 25,000	Waverly	Johnston	Indianola
Greater than 25,000	Marion	Iowa City	Des Moines

Table 2. County sampling by population tier.

Population Tier	County
Less than 10,000	Fremont
10,000 to 50,000	Cedar
Greater than 50,000	Dubuque

Evaluation

The following worksheet was used to evaluate the selected plans:

**Hazards Element Evaluation**

Entity:	
Plan Title:	
Population:	
Last Updated:	
Link:	

	Yes	No	N/A	Information
Does the entity have an approved FEMA Hazard Mitigation Plan?				
Is the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Plan referenced in the comprehensive plan?				
Are hazard mitigation elements incorporated into the comprehensive plan (e.g. Hazard chapter or section)?				
Does the comprehensive plan have a section on flood plains?				
Are there any other references to considering hazards during the planning process in the comprehensive plan?				

Results

- Six of the nine cities sampled has an approved FEMA Hazard Mitigation Plan or is part of the county's plan. Only one of the counties sampled has an approved plan while a second county is in the process of updating their expired plan.
- None of the sampled comprehensive plans contained a Hazard Mitigation or Hazards Assessment section, although many of the plans referenced considering certain hazards in the planning process. These references were mostly concerning flood plains and flood damage mitigation.
- Half of the plans sampled contained a section specifically on flood plain management with regard to land use. These sections came in the form of both text and maps.

Recommendations

The results show that none of the sampled plans addressed hazards as stated in the Hazards Element of the suggested local comprehensive plan guidelines. This suggests that the inclusion of a hazards section within local comprehensive plans is not a common practice. With this in mind, it is recommended that a Hazards section become standard in approval of comprehensive plans. To aid communities in meeting this goal, the state should develop guidance as to what these sections need to include; whether it simply be reference to an approved FEMA plan or a full hazards assessment.